

LETTER
TO
WILLIAM H. SEWARD,
BY AN
AMERICAN CITIZEN.

March 19th, 1861.

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JEREMIAH V chapter, 30th and 31st verses.

“That little bell.”



THE following letter was written to Mr. SEWARD in March, 1861, in reply to an appeal by him made on the 4th day of the same month—the occasion being the inauguration of ABRAHAM LINCOLN (the *first Sectional* President of the United States,) and the introduction of that Party and Policy into our Halls of Legislation which have at last succeeded in bringing the country to its present state, the very verge of ruin.

Probably no man in the country equalled Mr. Seward in his power to check the spirit of sectionalism, and so save the country from the long and bloody war through which it has just passed. But, for reasons which are not difficult to surmise, Mr. Seward adopted a different course.

Viewed as a Conservative by the people of all parties at the North, when he took the stump for the campaign of 1860, he commanded the attention of his hearers from Main to Kansas and it will be remembered that he did not present himself to the people of the South, not touching one of the Southern States, except, when as a matter either of necessity or convenience, he passed across Missouri on his way to Kansas, and all his addresses were as *insidiously* Radical and Sectional and Revolutionary as the most intense abolitionist could desire. What the Abolitionists failed utterly to do by violent denunciations of the *Constitution*, the *Law* and the *Supreme Court*, he accomplished by a milder but more effective denunciation enforced by an obsequious manner, the use of flattery, and the most wilful misrepresentation.

Mr. Seward's conduct since the period referred to, is familiar to all the observers of public men.

Always perfectly consistent with himself, and ever watchful of the changes of the tide in the political current, he acts and governs himself accordingly cautiously moving about among the *eddies*, and ready to shoot boldly out into the stream whenever the course of the tide is determined.

Is he not doing so now? Why does he not stand by the party, of which he is the acknowledged father, whose purpose to destroy the SUPREME COURT TO-DAY was suggested by *his own denunciations* of it in 1860. *Why does he not now denounce the Supreme Court, and the law of the United States, as he did in his speech 11th of March, 1858.*

Is the turning of the tide yet uncertain in his eyes? or is it not high enough yet to suit his purpose? Wait and see; But is such a man a Statesman?

"I am not ashamed to appeal to every citizen of New York, and ask him to say what I have neglected. I am not afraid to appeal to every section—to the East, to the West, to the North and to the South, equally—and to every State in every section, and to every man, to every woman, to every human being, freedman or bondsman, to say whether, in any word or deed of mine, I have done him wrong."—W. H. SEWARD, *March 4th, 1861.*

WM. H. SEWARD, ESQ.—*Sir* : It is not my intention to address you as a private citizen, although, for reasons which will be very obvious, I have not prefixed an “Hon.” to your name.

Privately you are a stranger to me, and viewing your character in a social light I cannot assail it, and I would not if I could. But, it is my intention to glance at your *political character*, and to scan your *political career*, that it may be seen by what standard the former is to be pronounced the character of a statesman, or the latter the career of a patriot.

I have neither the time nor the inclination to enter into every detail connected with your public life, however useful such an account might be, as affording instruction to the present and warning to future generations. The historian will do you justice when, it may be, in writing the history of the “Decline and Fall of the American Union,” he shall have occasion to compare the politicians of this day with the Prætorian Guard of ancient Rome, and to couple your name with that of the Prætorian who, from the ramparts of the camp, “proclaimed that the Roman world was to be disposed of to the best bidder by public auction.”

It shall be sufficient for me to note a few points only in your public life—just enough, perhaps, to show your inconsistencies, if not enough to stamp you as an unscrupulously ambitious and designing politician.

To do this it will not be necessary to go further back than the year 1838, as that period will enable me to give a few extracts from your writings and your speeches, especially noticing the policy adopted by you during the last presidential campaign, as determined by your speeches in the North and Northwest.

But let me proceed to the work: In 1838 you calmly and deliberately wrote, as you always calmly and deliberately write and speak, as follows: “I regard the judiciary as the proper tribunal to expound all constitutional questions, and that to the Constitution, and to such expositions

of it as are made by the courts at law, it is with me a principle of political action to yield obedience and support." These were your views, in 1838, regarding the powers of the Supreme Court and your duty as an American citizen.

Now, although it is not necessary to pass over so great a period of time—yet, for the sake of brevity, let us turn to a speech of yours made 11th of March, 1858, in which you say: "We deem the principle of the law [as expounded by the 'courts at law?'] for the capture of fugitives therefore unjust, unconstitutional and immoral, and thus, while patriotism withholds its approbation [from the Constitution and the laws enacted under it?] the conscience of our people condemns it." But let me make another comparison. In this same letter of 1838, from which I first quoted, you say: "It is proper that I should add that I am not convinced that it would be either wise, expedient or humane to declare to our fellow citizens of the Southern States, that if they travel to or from, or pass through the State of New York, they shall not bring with them the attendants whom custom, or education, or habit have rendered necessary to them." This is much in the same spirit as that in which WASHINGTON wrote to Gov. MORRIS, of Pennsylvania, in regard to the same subject, and elicited by the conduct of a society of Quakers who attempted to "liberate" a slave while accompanying his master to Philadelphia. He wrote: "If the practice of the society of which Mr. DALBY [a resident of Virginia, and the owner] speaks is not discontinued, none of those whose misfortune it is to have slaves as attendants will visit the city if they can possibly help it; because by so doing they hazard their *property*, as they must be at the expense (and this will not always succeed) of providing servants of another description."—SPARKS' *Life of Washington*, vol. ix, 159.

Now, let me turn again to your speech of the 11th March, 1858, and see what you say there concerning the law securing the return of fugitive slaves. It runs thus: "The law of nations disavows such compacts; the law of nature, written on the hearts and consciences of freemen, repudiates them; armed power could not enforce them [the laws?], because there is no public conscience to sustain them." And further, you say: "When we are legislating for States, all

these laws must be brought to the standard of the [higher?] law of God—must stand or fall by it.” Permit me to say, before proceeding, that that appears to be exactly what JOHN BROWN thought when he committed a raid upon the innocent and unsuspecting inhabitants of Harper’s Ferry—the difference between you being this: that he has “shown his faith by his works;” you have not.

But in regard to the “law of nations,” to which you so confidently refer as “disavowing such compacts” as secure the return of fugitives, let me call your attention to the several treaties with Great Britain concerning slaves and slave property, and also to the conduct of the administration under GEORGE WASHINGTON, regarding the return by the Spanish authorities of all the slaves who had escaped from the United States into Florida before it became part of the United States or its territory. Sir, these instances of nations recognizing the right and the necessity of returning slaves to their masters must have been very familiar to you, and the treaties which secured to our people the return of their property in slaves, or money as its equivalent, were based upon and now form a part of the “law of nations;” and I ask you in all candor, and I trust you will answer before the American people, who shall be your judge—Why did you state that which was not true? The authorities which I have selected to support me are treaties dated Paris, Nov. 30th, 1782, and Sept. 3d, 1783; and the Treaty of Ghent, Dec. 24, 1814, under which the price (an equivalent for slave property) of over one million two hundred thousand dollars was paid to the owners of deported slaves; and further, Geo. Washington’s action upon the same subject, when President. See his letter to James Seagrove, dated 20th May, 1771, in which he says: “Your first care will be to arrest the further reception of fugitive slaves who have fled to Florida; * * * * and your last object, which may demand the greatest address, will be to give a retrospective force to the orders of the Court of Spain beyond the date of that letter, and to procure the Governor’s orders for a general relinquishment of all fugitive slaves who were the property of the citizens of the United States.” Claim these principles, if you can, for the Republican party. You call loudly upon the name of Washington; but, alas!

you do not follow either his precepts or his example.

Now let me come down to a later date, and fresh in the minds of the people, still keeping in view what you said on 11th March, 1858, touching the "impossibility," the "unconstitutionality" and "immortality" of enforcing such a law as that requiring the return of fugitive slaves, [Daniel Webster said of such arguments as you use, and the men that use them, that "various are the efforts to denounce this law, to oppose its execution, to hold it up as a subject of agitation and popular excitement. They are as diverse as the varied ingenuity of men, and the aspect of such questions when they come before the public. It is a common thing to say that the law is odious, and that therefore it cannot be executed. That has always been said by those who do not mean it shall be enforced—not by anybody else. They assume the fact that it cannot be executed, to make true that which they wish shall turn out to be true. They wish that it shall not be executed, and therefore announce to mankind that it cannot be executed."] But let us come down to the later period, and to your speech in the U. S. Senate of 12th January, 1861, and let it be seen what you then said. With characteristic coolness and deliberation you say, in a well-digested and cunningly-written speech: "Therefore, Sir, as far as the abstract question whether, by the Constitution of the United States, the bondsman, who is made such by the laws of the State, is still a man or only property, I answer that * * * * when he has escaped from that State into another, the Constitution regards him as a bondsman who may not, by any law or regulation of that state (the one to which he has fled), be discharged from his service, but shall be delivered up, on claim, to the party to whom his service is due." Very well, sir. But in 1858, only three short years ago, you not only did not say this, but in substance you said the opposite. With you in 1838 the law was constitutional, in 1858 it was unconstitutional, and in 1861 it becomes constitutional again. Most wonderful statesman!

From January, 1861, let me go back two or three short months, and look at your campaign speeches.

In urging the abolition doctrines of the Republican party at Madison, Sept. 12, 1860, as your last hope, you have

the assurance (to use a mild term) to tell the inhabitants that "the whole responsibility rests upon the people of the Northwest. Abandon that responsibility," you say, "and "slavery extends from the Gulf of Mexico to the "Gulf of the St. Lawrence on the Atlantic coast." Truly, one don't know which to be startled and surprised at the most, the audacity of the speaker or the patience or credulity of his hearers. I would also call your attention to the sectional appeal contained in the same speech, and that part of it in which you say that the Eastern are "falling" and the Western "rising" States. and that the people of the South derive perpetual moral reinvigoration from the hardy sons of the North." Allow me to say, without further reference to this prevalent feature of all your speeches, that WASHINGTON must have had just such a character as yours in view when, in preparing his Farewell Address, he penned the following words: "In contemplating the causes which may disturb our Union, it occurs as a matter of serious concern, that any ground should have been furnished for characterizing parties by geographical discriminations—*Northern* and *Southern*, *Atlantic* and *Western*—whence designing men may endeavor to excite a belief that there is a real difference of local interests and views. One of the expedients of party to acquire influence within particular districts is to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other districts." Would that your hearers could have heard those words, and the warning which follows them, viz: You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heart-burning which spring from these misrepresentations; they tend to render alien to each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal affection." The alienation which has resulted from your course, is but another proof of this wide difference between your principles and those of WASHINGTON, with whose name you endeavor to support your generalities and stump speeches in the Senate and elsewhere. I must pass your campaign speeches with but few points noticed in them. Your obsequious address to the people of Kansas, however, calls to mind the words of ALEXANDER HAMILTON, who said: "History will teach us * * * that of those men who have overturned

the liberties of Republics, the greatest numbers have begun their career by paying obsequious court to the people, commencing demagogues and ending tyrants.”* Passing on to your Chicago speech of 3d October, 1860, we find you speaking as follows: “Fellow citizens, the Republican creed is no partisan creed. * * * What is the idea more or less than simply this: * * * Free soil, free labor, free speech, equal rights and universal suffrage. * * * We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created free and equal.”

JAMES MADISON said: “Theoretic politicians, who have patronized this species of Government, have erroneously supposed that by reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights, they would at the same time be perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions and their passions.” You go on, in the same speech, to say: “The first act of demoralization was the surrender of the territory of Missouri to slavery, and also, by implication, all the rest of the territory of Louisiana, acquired by purchase from France, that lay south of 36 degrees 30 minutes north latitude. Next, under the influence of the same demoralization, the whole of the peninsula of Florida, acquired from Spain, was surrendered to slavery.” History tells us that there was no surrender in either case, but that the treaty under which Florida was ceded to the United States secured to the people their effects and property—which were partly represented by slaves. When Louisiana was acquired by the United States, out of about 90,000 inhabitants, 40,000 were slaves, who were secured to their owners equally with other property. In other words, slavery possessed, or existed in the land; and, consequently, to say that these territories were “surrendered,” is simply untrue.

I cannot pass your allusion to JOHN BROWN, which also occurs in this speech, and is to this effect: “In 1854, after the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, * * * there was only one man left who hoped against the prevailing demoralization, and who cheered and sustained me through it, and that man was John Brown.” “[Sensation.]” I do not wonder at the “sensation,” and would ask you what effect you

* Since the above was written material for the history of Mr. Seward's tyrannical career, and his “little bell,” is not wanting.

intended to produce upon the people by such an apparent endorsement of John Brown?

In another portion of the same speech, you utter the following: "The Republican party will now complete this revolution. * * * The creed to which I have already adverted * * * announced the true determination and embodies the great living national idea of freedom, * * only waiting untill the success of the Republican party in the free States will be such as to warrant *free suffrage* in the slave States." How can free suffrage exist in the slave States without being preceded by the emancipation of the slaves? But one more reference to that wonderful Chicago speech, and I have done with it. You say: "Men, of whatever race or nation, in our estimation, are men, not merchandize: according to our faith they have a natural right to be men, but in the estimation of the other party they are not men but merchandize." I answer: "But we must deny the fact that slaves are considered merely as property (or merchandize), and in no respect whatever as persons (or men). The true state of the case is: they partake of both these qualities—being considered by our laws in some respects as persons and in other respects as property. * * * This is in fact their true character; it is the character bestowed upon them by the laws under which they live, and it will not be denied that these are the proper criterion." (JAMES MADISON, *Federalist*, No. 4.)

I might go on and show the sectional policy which has characterized your course ever since we laid the last of our great statesmen in the tomb, and the adroit manner in which you have changed the tone and tenor of your address, according to the necessities of your own case; but it would be of no avail. I do not think it possible, judging you out of your own mouth, to admit that you deserve a place among the patriots and statesmen of the United States; and I give the reasons which may be gathered from this letter, and a multitude of facts which must form a part of your history, as my reasons for saying, in reply to the appeal which heads this letter, for myself and for thousands and tens of thousands who are now suffering because of your espousal of the Abolition cause, that you have injured all of us. And not only this, but you have been mainly instrumental in dividing the Union—the North against the South: without your aid the ultra Abolitionists would have accomplished little or nothing—with your aid they have succeeded.

It is easy, now, to see that, in adopting the course you did, you hoped to jeopardize merely, and then to rise into power and favor as the savior of that which you had brought to the verge of destruction.

But you have discovered no new thing in the present condition of the country: you well knew, beforehand, that it would be far easier to run the ship of State upon the breakers, than to put her safely to sea again; and now you are realizing the *fact*.

I shall not venture to pass judgment upon your course for the whole American people. If the present generation does not, a future one will do you justice. If you have been acting the part of a mercenary, it will write you down among the insidious assailants of constitutional law and civil liberty, and among the Destroyers of this Republic.

If, on the other hand, we should be saved from the calamity which appears to await us, through any instrumentality of yours, it may be that you will be pointed out as one who, for the sake of place and power, was willing to risk the life of a great and happy nation, in order that he might gain popularity by saving it.

In either case your lot is not an enviable one. I trust that the present generation may have the opportunity of rewarding you as the *quasi*-savior of your country, and leave it for the historian to say whether or not you are not the most dangerous (because the most subtle) *politician* in this land at this time.

I am, sir,

One of the injured, Union-loving

AMERICAN CITIZENS.

New York, March 19th, 1861.

IF the republication of the foregoing letter should be the means of opening the eyes of any citizen to the *real* character of Mr. SEWARD as a *Public man*, as seen by his various speeches, particularly those published under the title of "THE NATIONAL DIVERGENCE AND RETURN," (which book, together with *HELPERS IMPENDING CRISIS*,**) formed the great campaign documents of the Republican party in 1860, it will have served its purpose.

* This book was endorsed by Mr. Seward and sixty-eight Republican Congressmen at the time of its issue.